THE WISH LIST - COMPILED
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This document summarizes over 100 replies to a query I posted on the coral list (November 1, 2000) regarding the 9th International Coral Reef Symposium in Bali, 23-27 October 2000. Let me explicitly state that this document is not a list of complaints, the Symposium was a great success and all credit should go to the international and local organizers, rather what this document attempts to do is elucidate concerns and possible improvements, which in turn may aid future organizers. I have made every attempt to extract *only* the essence of each reply (and note that this document is only 5 pages long). The replies are categorized into 9 broad themes that are not necessarily in order of priority. They are numbered for convenience. All names have been removed to give each comment some form of democratic weighting.

1. Overall timing of Symposium

1.1 Problem: The timing of the symposium was unfavorable for university staff and students because it was held during semester.
Solution: Hold the Symposium during university breaks, in July, which is applicable to both northern and southern hemispheres, allowing a combination of family holidays with business!

2. Scheduling and organization

2.1 Problem: There was disorientation throughout the week.
Solution: 1) Have arrival orientation sessions. 2) Place conspicuous signage in the convention center (or its equivalent) pointing to the locations of the various lecture halls.

2. 2 Problem: It was difficult to derive a 'global' overview on the status of the world's reefs.
Solution: On the first morning, brief overviews of the current status of the world's reefs, given by representatives of the major regions. Not to take more than one hour, but to ensure that everyone is familiarized with the major regional concerns.

2. 3 Problem: There were too many cancelled talks.
Solution: Perhaps, require full payment of registration fees well before the conference.

2.4 Problem: Coffee breaks were missing at strategic intervals when papers could be discussed and the authors met.
Solution: Coffee and tea could be supplied throughout the day.

2.5. Problem: Some rooms were too small. We need to find some way to better predict the number of people attending any one session.

Solution: If talks were on the web before hand then we could gauge the interests of individual sessions (possibly by ask for a ranking, or automatically counting session hits), or alternately have video overflow rooms.

2.6. Problem: There was no time to engage in the often extensive interpersonal discussions with one's colleagues - colleagues that you either don't get to see often enough, or those whom you have not yet met.

Solutions: 1) Have a meeting point. 2) Organize a messaging system so that participants can leave messages for others, an old-fashioned pigeonhole system might be more appropriate than an electronic system.

2.7. Problem: There were many identification problems, especially identifying people one had never met.

Solutions: 1) Photograph everyone when they register and then post up the photos with the person's name underneath. 2) Nametags with large letters! Request that the participant place the nametag on the right side of the chest; 3) Have a digital image directory of participants.

2.8 Problem: Many of the concurrent sessions were on similar topics resulting in many people not being able to attend talks that they were interested in. For example, restoration and ornamental aquarium talks were held concurrently; many people from restoration are interested in the ornamental trade and vice-versa (i.e., restoration techniques are used to propagate corals for aquariums).

Solution: Have broadscale topics (management, education, geology, reef fish, taxonomy, physiology) to set-up concurrent sessions so that multiple sessions dealing with the same broadscale interest do not all occur on the same day at the same time.

2.9 Problem: At least a couple of evenings two or three overlapping-interest fringe meetings clashed, and indeed seemed to have been organized without awareness of each other.

Solution: Schedule the meetings way in advance to reach a consensus and avoid overlap.

2.10 Problem: The schedule was too exhausting.

Solution: Have a 1/2 day off midweek - with optional organized trips.

2.11 Problem: There was no synthesis session.

Solution: Summarize all mini-symposiums on the final afternoon, this could be an effective way of bringing the whole symposium to everyone.

2.12 Problem: There were too many plenaries.

Solution: Fewer plenaries, not more than 1 per day.

2.13 Problem: There was no time allocated to talk to the people from the organizations that had set up booths.

Solution: Allocate (program) time to such events.

2.14 Problem: There was little opportunity to assess scholarships, post-docs and potential job vacancies.

Solution: Setup a bulletin board divided in two, labeled "Positions Offered" and "Positions Wanted".

3. Oral Presentations

3.1 Problem: There was little time available for discussions.
Solutions:
a. Every presentation should have been limited to 12 minutes for the presentation, 4 minutes for Q&A, and 4 minutes for a break to allow the movement between rooms for those of us that have broad interests.
b. Allocate time for specific discussion session for each mini-session, preferably not all on the same time and day!

3.2 Problem: There were too many talks per person, too many concurrent sessions, and no time for effective communication to meet specific goals (at least 30 people mentioned this).
Solutions:
a. Strict enforcement of a "one oral presentation per person" policy (at least 30 people suggested this solution).
b. There is a need for more posters, fewer accepted papers (higher acceptance standards), review papers or break-through papers only) (Comment: All-poster meetings, where only the most prominent scientists do talks, reduce opportunities for young scientists to gain valuable speaking experience, or to attract the attention that might land them a job).
c. Convene 'panel discussions' in which people would have 5 minutes to deliver their point (i.e., paper) and then the panel and the audience would participate in the discussion.
d. Anything that is not new, or novel, goes as a poster.
e. Ask ISRS to chose a subject for discussion each day.
f. The full text of papers would be available a month before the meeting on the web…authors would give a 5 minute overview of their papers plus a 5 minute question/answer session. (Comment 1: …requiring full-length papers on the web will prevent many authors from presenting their most interesting or current work at the meeting, which they may wish to publish elsewhere) (Comment 2: …original suggestion of submitting papers in advance of the meeting is admirable, but largely impractical).
g. Following the talks, the session chairs could then host a 30-minute synthetic review.
h. Everybody should have the right to present a poster and no one has an absolute right to speak. The International Committee sets up a program with Invited Plenary Speakers, Chairs and Co-Chairs (which are chosen to represent the range of interests). The Chairs and Co-chairs then invite two eminent speakers in their area. These four scientists then organize their symposium with additional participants. In addition, various general or topical symposia are set up. For these latter a Chair and Co-chair are nominated and they organize the symposium on the spot at the Congress by reviewing posters and then organizing a discussion session with 2-5 min contributions from the selected poster presenters and comments from the audience.
i. Invited plenaries, in perhaps 12-20 key sub-fields, with specific instructions to the speakers to discuss areas of consensus and controversy. 45 minute talks with at least 45 minutes for discussion. Suggest two sessions in the morning and two in the afternoon.
j. Focus on having regional conferences the year before, and have only invited papers (and posters) at the global ICRS. The 'regionals' could be staggered so that the global organizers could attend and select. One could emphasize producing a balanced and representative global program, thereby minimizing the feeling that a paper not chosen was not good enough (Comment: unless we are invited to the global ICRS in this scenario, we could not attend. This would create a division of have's and have not's).
k. There could be a "summer olympics/winter olympics" analogy alternating between ICRS (International Coral Reef Symposium) and ITMEMS (International Tropical Marine

Ecosystems Management Symposium) that could be synergistic, and possibly take some of the load from any single, large symposium.

4. Posters

4.1 Problem: The time allocated to the poster presentations was too brief, and in too small an area.

Solutions:

a. Need more than one session for poster presentations scheduled throughout the week.

b. Organize the poster sessions into broad themes.

c. Have posters presented in a more spacious room, with some sense of organization.

d. Handle posters with respect and to make them available to owners to retrieve within a reasonable time frame

e. Have poster sessions with breaks/refreshments - coffee, etc.

f. Do not have poster sessions at night or late in the day when everyone is tired.

g. Have a Chair responsible for each topic/theme. The Chair groups them for display in some logical manner, and prepares a summary introducing the section. This may be a written summary of highlights that appear in the program; or it may be delivered orally in a complementary oral papers session.

h. Posters are displayed in the central meeting area where registration, coffee, happy hours, receptions are held: i.e. the place where people will naturally gravitate to relax, meet and talk to people.

i. Rows of posters are far enough apart for people to be standing and talking about posters on either side with enough room for people to circulate easily between them: i.e. 2-3 times the spacing in Bali.

j. Certain topics and themes are *only* available as poster sessions.

k. It would also help to compile a set of guidelines about what is or is not appropriate for a poster, sizes of fonts, background colors, amount of text etc. In particular, a poster should NOT be a paper posted on a board - it should be a brief summary of the highlights.

5. The Program

5.1 Problem: Program was difficult to follow.

Solution(s):

a. A more coherent or logical daily agenda that doesn't require cross-referencing.

b. The abstracts shouldn't have been broken up into the major themes - Plenary presentations are OK to break out, but the remainder should have been simply alphabetized.

5.2. Problem: Difficult to organize personal schedule from the program

a. Make abstracts available on a web page two months prior to the start of the symposium so that we can read them in advance.

b. Provide the Program and Abstract Book in a digital format on CD-ROM with an index of keywords (submitted by the authors) to allow participants to search for keywords on their computers and then print out a personalized conference schedule; complete with dates, times, room numbers, paper titles, and authors.

c. The program should include the evening program and awards.

d. Sound a bell, or buzzer, in the gathering area before the start of each session.

6. Social events

Problem: There was no general meeting place where everyone would naturally congregate during breaks and at the end of the day.

Solution(s): Allocate a common area (with a bar) that people can gravitate to at the end of the day, perhaps even attached to each session - sort of a free talk area, perhaps even while talks are going on with video input to that area. …Although its hard to develop an intimate bar atmosphere for 1500! If drinking/eating areas are not handy to venue, an alternative could be a shuttle (booze bus) service from conference area to suitable area of town?

7. Accommodation

Problem: Some participants received no confirmation of hotel and had to book their own.

Solution: The conference organizers could reply to *all* registrants by e-mail, or fax, concerning hotel reservations.

8. Politics

…"keep all politics out of the mix will be appreciated by all."

9. Proceedings

Problem: Proceedings are often too expensive and slow in the making.

Solution(s):

a. Abandon publishing any Proceedings (at least of non-plenary lectures) following the conference, but instead allow full one page abstracts, i.e. 3 or 4 times as long as the present ones, long enough to include one or two tables or figures.

b. Bring camera-ready hard copies of papers.

c. Produce CD(s) of proceedings… reducing costs by 98%. Present papers as pdf-Files (Acrobat Reader, the tool to read and print pdfs, which is free).

d. Provide proceedings on a website. A table of the authors and the paper titles could be linked to the pdf files … with a searchable database. Keep it available until the next meeting.

e. To reduce download times and ease congestion, coral friends around the world could host mirror sites for a limited period so that everyone can download.

f. Use .rtf (Rich Text Format) to submit text; organizers should make the pdf files.

g. Use some sort of widely readable and loss-less format for technical figures. Non-critical photographs could be compressed JPG files, to save space, instead of TIFFs/BMP.

h. Included on the CD are images taken during the Conference.

i. Attendees should have the option to receive the hard copy of the proceedings some time after the meeting.

j. Why not simply have verbatim transcripts of the meeting itself, supplemented by copies of everyone's slides?

Footnote: An intriguing comment from Sir Nichlos Nutall: " … My dictionary of English Etymology says the word *Symposium* [emphasis added] is derived from the Greek for fellow drinker. A symposium, it says is a drinking party, a convivial meeting for discussion or a meeting for discussion. "